

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 376 715

FL 022 581

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TITLE Acquisition Processes of Hausa Interrogatives by a Hausa Child.  
PUB DATE Mar 94  
NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference on African Linguistics (25th, Rutgers University, NJ, March 1994).  
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS African Languages; Case Studies; \*Child Language; Foreign Countries; \*Hausa; \*Language Acquisition; \*Language Patterns; Language Research; \*Learning Processes; Uncommonly Taught Languages; Young Children  
IDENTIFIERS Africa; \*Interrogatives

## ABSTRACT

A case study of the acquisition of Hausa as the first language by a child focuses on acquisition of interrogatives. The subject was a male child aged 25-60 months. Data were drawn from observation and elicitation. Three phases of acquisition were distinguished. Strategies adopted by the child appeared to reflect realities and contacts in his daily life. At 25-36 months, one- and two-word speech was acquired and used in question forms with rising intonation, accompanied by gestures and body movements. From 36-48 months, simple patterns of Hausa questions were acquired. From 48-60 months, more complex question structures were learned, and intonation and tag questions were developed. By 60 months, the child was able to formulate and use Hausa questions approximately as adults do. Data tables concerning strategies and question types and frequencies are appended. (MSE)

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ACQUISITION PROCESSES OF HAUSA INTERROGATIVES BY A HAUSA CHILD

BY

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FL022581

ABSTRACT

This study is exclusively devoted to the acquisition process of Hausa language by a Hausa child from ages 25 to 60 months. The study was intended to find the patterns of the child's language acquisition, the stages he passes through and the strategies he employs to acquire Hausa as his first language. Specifically, this article focuses on the acquisition process of interrogatives only.

From 25 - 36 months one and two words speech was acquired and used in question forms with rising intonation. Gestures and body movements were used extensively by the child and that was what enabled the researcher to understand the intended meaning of the speech. From 36 - 48 months, Ina + N (Where + Noun), Mene ne + Spec (What is it + Specifier), Me + VC (What + Verbal Complex), Yaya + Short Poss. (How + Short Possessive) patterns of Hausa questions were acquired. The strategy of learning from simple to complex was adhered to by the child.

From 48 - 60 months, the Ina + VC (Where + Verbal Complex), Ina + NP + VC (Where + Nominal Phrase + Verbal Complex), Wa + NP (Who + Nominal Phrase) and others were acquired by the child. In addition, intonation questions as well as tag questions developed. By the end of 60 months, the child was able to

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master the questions formation of Hausa language and was able to use them approximately as adults do.

Acquisition Processes of Hausa Interrogatives by a Hausa Child

1.0 Introduction:

The subject of the study was born on January, 19~~88~~<sup>89</sup>. He was 2~~5~~<sup>6</sup> months old when the study began and reached 60 months old when it ended. Specifically, the study began on January 19~~88~~<sup>89</sup> and ended on December, 19~~91~~<sup>90</sup>. The study was conducted in Katsina, a town in Northern part of Nigeria where Hausa is spoken as first language by the people of the area. Phase one of the study ran from 25 to 36 months, while phase two from 36 to 48 months, and phase three from 48 to 60 months.

The aim of the research was to study the patterns, stages and strategies of language acquisition by the subject in respect to the acquisition of statements, interrogatives, commands and negatives. Diary observation, elicitation and recording procedures were used to obtain comprehensive data about the subject. The diary was used to record not only the subject's utterances but also his gestural reactions, body movement and other non-linguistic activities. As for elicitation, the subject was engaged into conversation to elicit from him utterances which might be considered as statements, interrogatives, commands and negatives. As the subject talked, his utterances were tape recorded in cassettes and transcribed immediately. Although this study covered statements, interrogatives, commands

and negatives, this paper is concentrated on the acquisition processes of interrogatives only.

1.1 Acquisition of the Hausa Interrogatives

1.1.1 Phase One: 25 - 36 Months

Abubakar acquired intonation types of questions in phase one of this study which ran from 25 to 36 months. Some of them were one words and others two words used in question form. The earliest forms of these questions appeared at 25 months as contextually shown:

(A. looking at H. in the room)

A: (Searches the room but does not find H. He then turns to R. and says)

1. Hajiya?/

(Hajiya?)

(25 months)

(A. is disturbing H. in the room, and she sends him to get water for her).

H: Debo man ruwa can

(Get some water for me down there)

A: (Looks at H. and says with a rising intonation)

2. Luwa?/luwa?/(ruwa)

(water? water?)

(28 months)

Although only one word was used, the context situation of the utterance led me to understand the subject's intention, which was an inquiry about Hajiya (the mother) as shown in example 1 above. That is, the one word was used in the context of asking questions about the where-about of the mother.

Two word questions began to appear when Abubakar was 28 months old. The examples below show how he employed them contextually.

(A. wants to eat tuwo (Hausa type of food).)

(Checks a pot but does not find anything in it. He then turns to H. and says)

3. Hajiya tuwo?/

(Hajiya tuwo)

(28 months)

H. Ba tuwo. Ya kare

(No tuwo. It is finished)

In a different context, Abubakar searched my room to see whether I had arrived from Zaria, as shown below:

(R. arrives from Zaria and enters his room. A. does not see R. but other children see him and are saying Baba ya dawo (Dad has arrived))

A: (Searches R's room saying)

4. Baba joʔ/Baba/ oʔ/(zo)  
(Dad arrived? Dad arrived?)  
(29 months)

Gestural reactions including touching, pointing and head-shaking were the strategies adopted in acquiring two word utterances in the form of questions. Other examples of two word utterances are the following:

A: (Looks at H. and points to R. and to a motorcycle. He then says)

5. Mashin baba/  
(Machine dad?)  
(32 months)

This two word question can be contextually taken to mean Wannan mashin na baba ne? (Is this dad's machine?) which Abubakar reduced to only two words. In this situation, therefore, Abubakar used not only gestural reaction in producing question form but also the reduction strategy. That is, he deleted function words leaving only the contentive words of mashin (machine) and baba (dad).

Abubakar can be said to have passed through two stages of question process in phase one of his language acquisition. These are one word and two word intonation questions. The

one word began at 25 months and that of two words at 28 months of age. These were accompanied with gestures and actions which adults can only contextually understand. See Table 1 for the summary of the findings relating to interrogatives.

1.1.2 Phase Two: 36 - 48 Months

In this phase, various types of questions were acquired by the subject. They include Ina (where) + Noun; Mene ne (What is it) + Specifier; Me (What) + Verbal Complex; Yaya (How) + Short possessive; and Ina (Where) + Short Possessive. See Table 2 for the distributions and frequencies of the questions types.

The first question formation to appear in phase two of this study is the Ina (where) + Noun such as Ina ruwa? (Where is water?) at 36 months. At 37 months, Mene ne (What is it) + Specifier developed. The following are the examples:

(A. is searching for his ball which B. hides)

A: (Searches under the bed and says to H.)

6. Ina kwallo?/Ina?

(Where is ball? Where?)

(Ina + N: 36 months)

H: Tana cikin kwando

(It is in the basket)

A: (Points to the picture of an elephant, draws R's attention and says)

7. Mene ne wannan?/

(What is this?)

(Mene ne + Spec: 37 months)

Abubakar used the Ina (Where) type of question whenever he did not see his missing object as in example 6. The Mene ne (What is it) + Specifier type of question (See example 4) was not extended to include plural form such as, Mene ne wadannan? (What are these?) at the age of 37 months. In the same way, Ina (Where) + Noun question (See example 6) was not extended to the plural form of Ina kwallayenmu? (Where are our balls?). Abubakar persistently stuck to using only the singular form of the two types of question formations.

The strategy the subject used in acquiring the two forms of question (i.e. Ina (where) + N, and Mene ne (what is it) + Specifier); was that of the process that began from simple to complex. He, for example, began to acquire simple question formula (example 6) by concentrating the language acquisition effort on singular forms before proceeding to the plurals.

At the age of 38 months, Me (what) + Verbal Complex question developed. The examples below show the speech situations.

A: (Pulls at N's shirt and says)

8. Me kake yi?/

(What are you (M) doing?)

(Me + VC: 38 months)

N:Ni Boyewa nai

(I have hidden (myself))

It is interesting to note that this form of question always requires the insertion of pre-verbal pronouns and verb yi (do). That is, the question form requires, for example, a pre-verbal pronoun kake, and a type of verb yi (do) as the subject was able to use in example 2 above. He was, however, able to use only three forms of the pre-verbal pronouns during the ages 34 - 40 months. These were second person pre-verbal pronouns referring to masculine, feminine and plural as in kake (you are (M)), kike (You are (F)) and kuke (You are (P)) respectively. The other forms of the pronouns referring to the first and third persons were not used in this type of question formation by the subject.

This reveals another strategy adopted by Abubakar. He first concentrated on acquiring the pre-verbal pronouns of the second person and used them in question forms of Me + VC (What + VC) pattern. His close contact and direct communication with people might be one of the reasons why he first acquired the second person pre-verbal pronouns first, which were used in the Me (What) + Verbal Complex form of question before other pronouns.

At 40 months, Abubakar acquired the strategy for asking the

name of any stranger that he came into contact with, as shown in example *q* below:

(*FA* stranger comes into A's house)

A: (Moves toward the strange boy and says)

*q*. Yaya sunanka?/

(How is your (M) name?)

(i.e. What is your (M) name?)

(40 months)

The stranger: Sunana Musa

(My name is Musa)

Abubakar started using this type of question (example *q* above) at the age of 40 months before he began to extend it to the singular feminine form Yaya sunanki? (What is your (F) name?). This might be connected to the fact that the children that came to play with the subjects were all male. The subject never extended the question form to plural and other singular forms such as Yaya sunanku (what are your (P) names? or Yaya sunansu? (what <sup>are their</sup> ~~name~~ name?))

The strategy of using singular masculine before singular feminine shows how Abubakar learnt things that constantly came into contact with. Although there were female in the household, all his friends that he played with were male. This may be the

reason why he stuck to using these words, and even extending them to feminine and plural. This strategy also shows the egocentric tendency of the subject in giving attention to things that concerned him only.

At 46 months, Abubakar added possessive pronouns to the previous questions already acquired at 36 months. That is, he began to construct questions of the structure Ina (where) + short possessive, as shown in the following examples:

(A. is looking for his shorts)

A: (Moves to H. and says)

10. Ina wandona?/

(Where are my shorts?)

(Ina + short poss: 46 months)

H: (Angrily replies)

(Ban sani ba)

(I don't know)

A: (Repeats the question saying)

11. Wandona/ina wandona?/

(My shorts. Where are my shorts?)

At 46 months, Abubakar used the first person singular possessive pronoun -na as in Ina wandona? (where are my shorts?) as shown in examples 10 and 11 above. He also used the second person possessive pronoun referring to singular masculine and

singular feminine as shown in the following examples:

(A. discussing with N.)

A: (Asking N. a question, saying)

12. Ina hularka?/

(Where is your (M) cap?)

(Ina + Short Poss: 47 months)

(A. discussing with HM)

A: (Asking HM question saying)

13. Ina abink1?/

(Where is your (F) thing?)

(Ina + Short Poss: 47 months)

Abubakar was observed to avoid using third person possessives in his speech. That is, he never used the third person possessives of the types Ina hularsa? (where is his cap?) or Ina kallabinta? (Where is her headtie?). A possible explanation would be because third persons are largely spoken in their absent. The subject's behaviour at 47 months was mainly towards concrete things and physical persons he saw and interacted with. Although Abubakar had at that age (47 months) developed the concept of abstract things, he mainly concentrated on physical and concrete things.

At the age of 48 months, Abubakar developed a strategy of first mentioning the title name of an elderly person he was

talking to before asking him questions or the proper names of his friends. The following show the examples:

(A. wants to drink his koko)

A: (Touching the dress of H. and says)

14. Hajiya, ina kokona?/

(Hajiya, where is my koko?)

(N + Ina + Short.Poss: 48 months)

(R. comes without his motorcycle)

A: (Looks at R. and asks)

15. Baba, ina mashinka?/

(Dad, where is your machine?)

(N + Ina + short poss: 49 months)

The strategy of first mentioning the title name of a person before asking questions was observed to have been used to always draw the attention of the person the subject was talking to or directing his question to. See Table 3 for the summary of findings relating to interrogatives.

#### 1.1.3 Phase Three: 48 - 60 Months

Abubakar acquired variety of questions of the structures Ina (Where) + VC; Ina (where) + NP + VC; Ina (Where) + Asp.Pro; Wa (who) + NP; intonation questions, and tag questions. See Table 4 for the distributions and frequencies of the question forms.

Abubakar developed the Ina (Where) + Verbal Complex (VC) type of questions at the age of 49 months. He, however, stuck to using the question form in sentences relating to general past and future tenses as shown in the following examples:

(Us. comes to A's house to play)

A: (Asking Us. politely)

16. Ina ka je?/

(where did you go?)

(Ina + VC: 49 months)

Us. Ina gida

(I was at home)

(B. is going out)

A: (Follows B. and asks)

17. Ina za ka?/

(where are you going?)

(Ina + VC: 49 months)

Abubakar did not use the Ina (where) + VC question with other tenses apart from the general past and future tenses mentioned earlier. From 50 months, this form of question was extended to Ina (where) + NR + VC as in Ina Nura ya je? (Where did Nura go?) as shown in the following examples:  
(A. does not see N. for some days)

A: (Asking Us. about N.)

18. Ina Nura ya je?

(where did Nura go?)

(Ina + NP + VC: 50 months)

US: Bai lafiya

(He is not well)

In another context Abubakar was eating yam and making dialogue with his sister as follows:

A: (Eating pounded yam and saying to HM)

19. Ina babaya sawo?/

(Where did dad buy (them?))

(Ina + NP + VC: 51 months)

HM: Me ya sawo?

(What did he buy?)

20. Doya/

(Yams)

Abubakar seemed to be systematically acquiring question formation. He first acquired Ina (where) + VC at 49 months in which the verbal complex consists of pre-verbal pronoun and verb only as shown in example 16. Later, at 50 months he added the NP + VC to his Ina (where) question forms as in example 18. This is a systematic language acquisition used by the subject.

Abubakar developed the Ina (where) + Aspectual Pronouns at the age of 54 months. Questions such as Ina yake (where is he?) were used by the subject whenever he was looking for his missing object. He stuck to using only five aspectual pronouns namely, yake (he is doing (M)), take (she is doing (F)), kike (You are doing (F)), and kuke (You are doing (P)), with Ina (where) question particle.

The examples below illustrate the forms of the questions:  
(HM. hides under a bed)

A: (Looking for HM. and asking)

21. Ina kike?/Ina kike?/

(Where are you? Where are you?)

(Ina + Asp.Pro: 54 months)

(HL. and B. are taking their bath in the bathroom and making noise).

A: (Knocking on the door, A. says)

22. Ina kuke?/

(Where are you? (P))

(Ina + Asp.Pro: 55 months)

The wa (who) + NP question form appeared at the age of 56 months when the subject began to ask questions of the structure, Wa ya sha ruwa? (Who drank water?). Abubakar learned to either

add object noun as in the above sentence or used only a verb as in Wa ke so? (Who wants it?). The following examples illustrate:

(R. gives biscuits and A. hides the biscuits under a pillow. When A. leaves, B. eats the biscuits. <sup>When A. comes he</sup> ~~he~~ does not find the biscuits. He asks)

23. Wa ya ci biskit?/

(Who ate the biscuits?)  
(Wa + VP: 56 months)

(N. Us. and A. playing football)

A: (Raises up his ball and asks)

24. Wa ke so?/

(Who wants?)

(Wa + VP: 57 months)

The systematic strategy of question formation adopted by Abubakar can be clearly seen in the phase three of this study. In phase one and two, Abubakar did not at all attempt to use object noun at the end of questions because his attention was concentrated on mastering the Ina (where) question type with its accompanied verbal complex, in which only the pre-verbal pronouns and verbs were involved as in examples 16 and 17. At phase three, however, Abubakar seemed to improve his question acquisition strategy by adding an object at the end of question as can be seen in example 23.

The already acquired simple intonation question in phase one of this study expanded in phase three and continued to be used in sentences containing more than two words as can be seen in the followings:

(A. wants someone to play with)

A: (Moves to N. who is sitting on the floor unwilling to play and asks)

25. Kana yi wasa?/ (yin...)

(Do you want to play?)

(Int. Q: 58 months)

N: Ban yi

(I don't want to)

A: 26. Ba ka yi wasan?/

(Don't you do the play?)

It is interesting to note that although the subject learned how to form the intonation question, he still had not mastered the skill of adding the morpheme -n to the verb yi (do) in his question formation. He always deleted it in his type of sentences. Thus, instead of kana yin wasa? (Do you play?), he constructed the question as in example 25 above by removing the -n morpheme.

Tag question using ko particle began to be used by Abubakar when he was 59 months old. The intonation device was still used.

He also developed the technique of inserting ko particle at the end of the sentence as in the following examples:

A: (Talking to HL.)

27. Kana zuwa, ko?/

(You are going, aren't you?)

(Tag. Q: 59 months)

A: (Talking to UM)

28. Ba ki sha, ko?/

(Don't you (F) drink; do you?)

(Tag. Q: 59 months)

The final stage of question acquisition was the development of transformational skills. That is, the skills of transforming declarative sentences into question forms by deleting certain aspects of a sentence as shown in these examples:

(UM. is playing with A's toy car)

A: (Touches UM's back and asks)

29. wasa kike yi?/  
(playing you are doing?)  
(are you playing?)

(Trans. Q: 60 months)

(N. was urinating)

A: (Moves to N. and asks)

30. Fitsari kake yi?/  
(urine you are doing?)  
(Are you urinating?)

(Trans.Q. 60 months)

The declarative form (untransformed form) of the sentence, Fitsari kake yi? (Are you urinating?) is kana fitsari (You are (M) urinating) or kana yin fitsari (You are )M) urinating), which was transformed to Fitsari kake yi? (Are you urinating?) by changing the position of the word fitsari (urine) from the end to the beginning of the sentence. The aspectual pronoun kana (you are) of the declarative was also changed to kake (you are) of the transformed sentence. The verb yi (do) was also added in the sentence. See Table 5 for the summary of the findings relating to interrogatives.

#### KEY TO INITIALS

- A = Abubakar (the subject of the study).
- B = Babangida (a senior brother to the subject).
- H = Hajiya - (Hajiya Umma, the mother of the subject).
- HL = Halilu - (a senior brother to the subject).
- HM = Halima (a senior sister to the subject).
- MS = Mustafa (a senior brother to the subject).
- N = Nura (a friend to the subject).
- R = Researcher (the father of the subject).

KEY TO ABBREVIATION

F = Feminine

Ina + N = Where + Noun

Ina + Short. Poss = Where + Short Possessive.

Ina + Asp. Pro = Where + Aspectual Pronoun.

Ina + Q = Where + Question.

Me + VC = What + Verbal Complex.

M = Masculine

P = Plural

S = Singular

Tag. Q = Tag Question.

Transf. Q = Transformation Question.

VC = Verbal Complex.

TABLE 1

Summary of Findings relating to Interrogatives (25 - 36 Months).

| Patterns                   | Stages    | Strategies          |
|----------------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| <u>One Word Questions</u>  | 25 months | Rising intonation.  |
| Noun Words only            | 28 months | Gestural reactions. |
| <u>Two Words Questions</u> |           |                     |
| Noun + Noun                | 29 months |                     |
| Noun + Verb                |           |                     |

TABLE 2

Distributions and Frequencies of the Question Types (36 to 48 months)

| Types of Questions                               | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Ina + N<br>(Where + N)                           | 412       | 26.96      |
| Mene ne + Spec<br>(What is it + Spec)            | 346       | 22.64      |
| Me + VC<br>(What + VC)                           | 294       | 19.24      |
| Yaya + Short. Poss.<br>(How + Short Poss.)       | 131       | 8.57       |
| Ina + Short Poss<br>(Where + Short Poss)         | 131       | 8.57       |
| N + Ina + Short Poss<br>(N + Where + Short Poss) | 845       | 22.58      |
| Total =                                          | 1,520     | 100%       |

TABLE 3

Summary of Finding relating to Interrogatives (48 - 60 Months)

| Types of Questions                 | Ages      | Strategies                        |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| Ina + VC<br>(Where + VC)           | 49 months | Simplification of sentences.      |
| Ina + NP + VC<br>(Where + NP + VC) | 50 months | Intonation device of rising tone. |
| Wa + VP<br>(Who + VP)              | 56 months | Transformational strategy.        |
| Intonation Questions               | 58 months |                                   |
| Tag Questions                      | 59 months |                                   |

TABLE 4

Distribution and Frequencies of the Types of Questions  
(48 - 60 Months).

| Patterns             | Frequencies | Percentage |
|----------------------|-------------|------------|
| Ina + VC             | 435         | 14.00      |
| Ina + NP + VC        | 398         | 12.82      |
| Ina + Asp. Pro.      | 504         | 16.24      |
| Wa + VP              | 482         | 15.50      |
| Intonation Questions | 573         | 18.46      |
| Tag Questions        | 401         | 18.92      |
| Total =              | 3,104       | 100%       |

TABLE 5

Summary of Findings relating to Interrogatives (48 - 60 Months)

| Types of Questions                 | Ages      | Strategies                        |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| Ina + VC<br>(Where + VC)           | 49 months | Simplification of sentences.      |
| Ina + NP + VC<br>(Where + NP + VC) | 50 months | Intonation device of rising tone. |
| Wa + VP<br>(Who + VP)              | 56 months | Transformational strategy.        |
| Intonation Questions               | 58 months |                                   |
| Tag Questions                      | 59 months |                                   |

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